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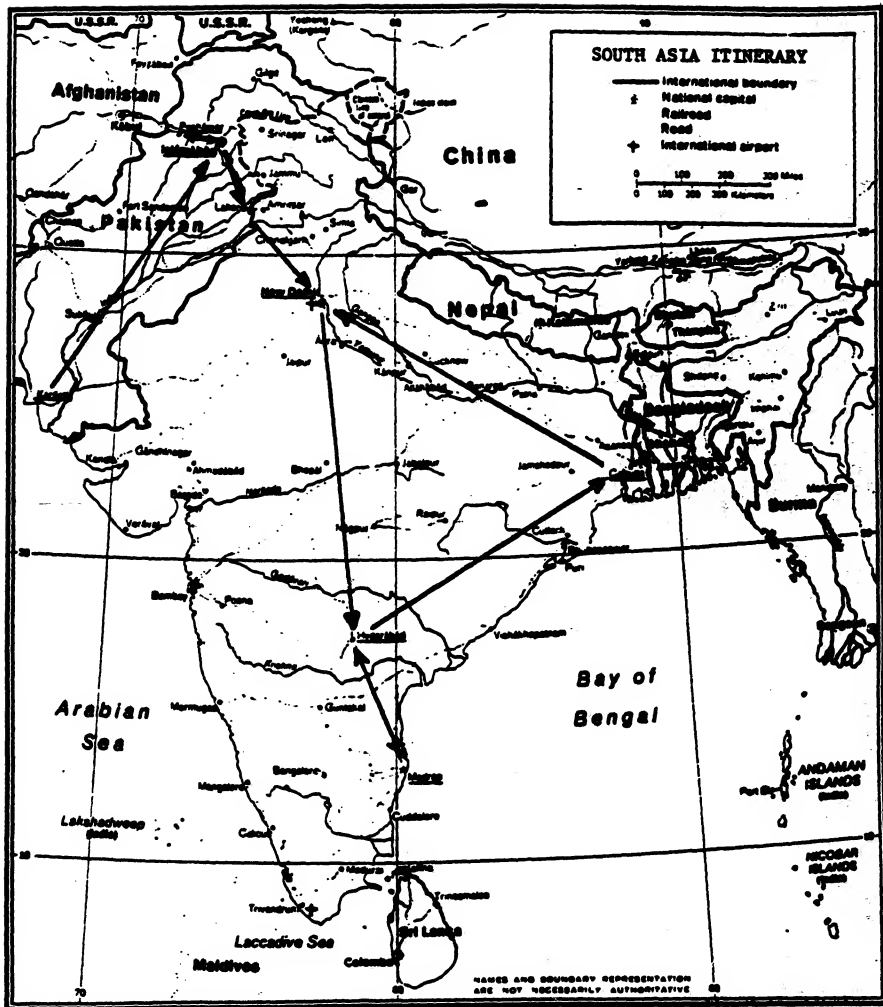
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SOUTH ASIA: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND ISSUES FOR U.S. POLICY
REPORT ON A TRIP TO PAKISTAN AND INDIA, APRIL 8-30, 1986

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During the period May 8-April 30, 1986, I travelled to eight cities in Pakistan and India in the course of a speaking tour sponsored by the United States Information Agency. My talks on U.S. policy towards South Asia, U.S. nuclear non-proliferation policy, U.S. regional security perceptions, and the role of Congress in U.S. foreign policy, put me in touch with a large number of scholars, journalists, and government officials, and gave me an opportunity to hear their views on these and other aspects of U.S. relations with the region. In addition, I was able to conduct independent research on issues relating to my CRS responsibilities through private meetings with U.S. and local officials, voluntary agency representatives (Afghan refugee situation), and others.

General Impressions: Attitudes Towards the United States

The United States appears to be losing the battle for domestic political influence in South Asia. Both in Pakistan, a tacitly allied country, and India, a peace and friendship treaty partner of the Soviet Union, the attitudes of the educated and political elites remain strongly critical of U.S. positions in the region. This polarization was heightened but not fundamentally changed by the April 15, 1986, bombing raid on Libya, which took place shortly before the end of my program in Pakistan.

It would be easier to accept the arguments of U.S. Embassy officials, especially in Pakistan, that the anti-U.S. attitudes of the intellectual elites are not broadly representative, were it not for the fact that

- 1) these are the very groups targeted by U.S. information programs
- and; 2) there is no significant U.S. program aimed at reaching the wider public.

Hearing the questions and views of the target group audiences arranged by USIS, one would have no sense that the United States has

anything but negative influence on the lives of Indians and Pakistanis.

This does not mean that there are no South Asians with a favorable view of the United States. At the personal level, many academics, journalists, government officials and businessmen will express sympathy and understanding for U.S. policy dilemmas. Many have been educated in the United States or have family connections with those who live and work here. But understanding and sympathy do not translate into approval, and only the occasional "maverick" will publicly express support for U.S. policy on issues such as arms control, U.S. regional security perceptions, Middle East policy, nuclear non-proliferation policy or, with some exceptions, the Afghanistan conflict.

One of the striking impressions of a speaking tour of eight cities is the frequency with which essentially the same criticism of U.S. policy is made in essentially the same phraseology. This phenomenon partly reflects intense nationalism and a lack of diversity of opinion on national interest issues. It also suggests widespread acceptance, consciously or unconsciously, of Soviet propaganda themes, even by people who have no affinity for the U.S.S.R.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, anti-U.S. attitudes seem to result from dissatisfaction with the hybrid political structure erected by President Zia-ul Haq to retain ultimate power behind a facade of limited representative government, and the widespread belief that U.S. support helps Zia stay in power. Many Pakistanis also believe that their government's current stance on the Afghanistan issue is harmful to Pakistan's interests, and that this stand is a product of U.S. pressure. Many doubt the credibility of U.S. security assurances and criticize American unwillingness to offer guarantees against what most see as the more

likely threat of an attack by India. Another frequent charge is that the United States was instrumental in the overthrow and killing of Prime Minister Bhutto. In a somewhat more positive but equally perverse vein, many Pakistanis ask whether in view of the recent changes in the Philippines and the return of Miss Benazir Bhutto to Pakistan, the United States might be thinking of changing horses in Islamabad.

Significance: Given the general lack of support for U.S. positions in the Third World, one might well ask whether these attitudes are really significant. In Pakistan's case, the answer depends on the viability of the current political structure and the extent to which any government of Pakistan can carry out a policy that lacks broad support. So long as foreign policy remains essentially in the hands of Zia and his foreign minister Sahabzada, Yaqub Khan, backed by the Army, the lack of popular support is not a grave liability. Even Benazir Bhutto, were she to come to power in a peaceful transition, might well continue the U.S. relationship and maintain essentially the same posture on the Afghanistan question, since it is hardly clear that Pakistani national interests would be served better by a radical reversal of policy. In fact, Bhutto has expressed opposition to recognition of the Kabul regime and called for a political settlement based on a Soviet withdrawal and the return of the refugees — essentially current Pakistani policy. But were there to be a political upheaval bringing to power a leftist-populist regime, under Bhutto or another figure, Pakistan's Afghan policy and the U.S.-Pakistan security relationship would likely crumble.

India

Unlike the situation in Pakistan, in India the government's policy towards the United States enjoys broad public support. With some notable

regional exceptions, Indians are strongly nationalistic and see U.S. policies -- especially aid to Pakistan and friendship with China -- as antagonistic to India's interests. At the same time, Indians widely admire American democracy and increasingly respond to U.S. popular culture. At the personal level Indians like and accept Americans. Due to the complexity of India's own political system and its democratic basis, Indians generally have a good understanding of how our system works and considerable tolerance for its imperfections. In other respects, however, American values do not thrive in the Indian milieu. For instance, ordinary Indians understand that American workers benefit from capitalism and see it as good for America, but they view Indian capitalists as exploiters of labor and corruptors of the political system. Consequently, they generally do not respond positively to pro-free market themes or even to Rajiv Gandhi's economic liberalization measures.

Significance: The United States has a comparatively sophisticated and extensive public information program in India, but it labors against fundamental obstacles. These include an even larger and better endowed Soviet effort, with an extensive network of book shops with publications in indigenous languages, and the liability of U.S. security support for India's traditional enemies, Pakistan and China. Repeated USIA polling confirms that educated Indians believe that the United States is antagonistic to Indian interests while the Soviet Union is supportive. These attitudes are not likely to change given the existing geopolitical lineup in the region, which remains the basic determinant of the Indian position and Indian public attitudes.

Libya Bombing

The U.S. attack on Libya took place while I was in Islamabad. There were no serious anti-U.S. incidents in the capital, but due to major demonstrations planned in Lahore, U.S. Information Service (the overseas component of USIA) officers decided to cancel my program in Multan, in Punjab state, on April 16. This action was taken less on account of security considerations than out of a desire not to have the first program at the university in recent years marred by unpleasant incidents.

U.S. officials were angered by the harsh criticism from Pakistan's foreign ministry. Later, it became clear that the government had little choice but to take a strong public stance, lest the opposition and the Islamic right (now in support), attack it for accommodating the United States. Pakistan subsequently played a moderating role in the Delhi meeting of the Nonaligned foreign ministers and, like other conservative Islamic states, gave only rhetorical support to Qaddafi.

My talk at the American Center in Islamabad on April 15 featured an incident in which about a half-dozen student members of the audience shouted "down with Reagan, down with America and send long live Qaddafi," and walked out. The atmosphere was tense and the audience was less than receptive to my address on U.S. regional security perspectives. The Muslim, a Shi'a-owned and generally anti-American English language daily, headlined the talk "Rough Sailing for U.S. Scholar."

Indians share U.S. concerns about terrorism and few Indians have any regard for Qaddafi. At the same time, the bombing which came two days before the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit meeting, put the Indian government in a difficult position. Some apparent crossed signals put the hard line statements of foreign minister Bhagat at variance with

somewhat milder criticisms from Rajiv Gandhi. One rumor is that this episode contributed significantly to Bhagat's replacement by commerce minister P. Shiv Shankar.

When I challenged Indian audiences about India's support of the NAM resolution, which characterized the bombing as "unprovoked," they expressed discomfort. At the same time, however, they argued that if the United States cared at all about NAM opinion, it would have postponed the attack until after the Delhi meeting. Foreign ministry officials seemed anxious to put the whole affair behind them as soon as possible. In my public lectures and in talks with officials I emphasized that the Indian stand would make it all the more difficult for the Reagan Administration to mobilize political and bureaucratic constituencies for support on issues of concern to India such as technology transfer and cooperation against Sikh extremists in the United States.

Afghanistan

While American supporters of the Afghan cause have been concerned about the implications of the ongoing Geneva talks and troubled by recent Soviet tactical successes, those closer to the conflict in Peshawar and Islamabad, including U.S. Embassy and A.I.D. officials, Pakistani officials, resistance figures, and voluntary aid agency representatives, generally professed to see no fundamental changes in the situation. All expressed interest, however, in the question of how deep the congressional and public commitment to the resistance went, and whether Congress would eventually tire of the conflict.

War Situation

Overall, those interviewed suggested that both the conflict and the casualties are intensifying, but a strategic stalemate still prevails.

-- The resistance is better armed but Soviet operations are becoming more efficient, especially those involving Spetsnaz (Soviet special forces) commandos.

-- The PDPA regime remains dependent on Soviet support for its survival (Karmal's successor, Najibullah, has even less an independent political base).

-- It is still true that there is no basis for any kind of broadened Soviet-backed regime. The educated elite and others who previously supported modernization are in exile, in prison, or dead.

-- Soviet efforts last year to buy off the Shinwari and Afridi tribes of the Afghan-Pakistan frontier region were not really successful. After taking arms and money the tribes defected, in one case sending food to the mujahidin when they came under heavy Soviet pressure.

Aid Situation

The resistance is better armed (witness the huge caches at the Jawar base that were seized by the Soviets in March 1986) but faces critical shortages of food, medicines and agricultural supplies. These limitations make it difficult for the mujahidin to consolidate their administration in "liberated" areas or to keep the population in place in areas under Soviet military pressure. The U.S.A.I.D.-funded cross-border aid program is now functioning, but both U.S. and international aid sources say that the current level of support is a comparative "drop in the bucket".

Meanwhile, some of the voluntary agencies are having problems continuing their operations. The European doctors of the French group Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF), for instance, had (at least temporarily) pulled their teams out of Afghanistan due to objections of the Jamiat-e-Islami resistance group to the presence of female doctors. Soviet military pressure and better intelligence has generally made it more difficult and dangerous for westerners to function in Afghanistan.

Pakistani Stance

Pakistan is standing firm on its conditions for a political settlement and has responded vigorously to Soviet/Afghan military provocations. Shortly after my return, two Pakistani F-16's shot down two intruding Soviet-made SU-22's, one of which fell into Pakistani territory. The Pakistanis are disturbed, however, about growing U.S. publicity for their country's role as a conduit for U.S.-supplied weapons — particularly the leaked report that the Reagan Administration had decided to supply "Stinger" anti-aircraft missiles to the resistance. (Others expressed dismay that the report has created expectations among the resistance that, if not promptly fulfilled, will seriously harm morale.)

Pakistan's civilian prime minister, Mohammad Khan Junejo, is wary of visibly involving himself in Afghan policy, though he has defended the policy in the national assembly. Apparently due to concern about adverse political fallout, Pakistan has not yet set up a government-sanctioned umbrella organization to channel the cross-border humanitarian aid and coordinate the activities of private voluntary agencies.

Domestic Politics in Pakistan

The April 1986 return of Benazir Bhutto to Pakistan constituted the liveliest subject of political discussion. She is widely popular, and her massive rallies have struck responsive cords among Pakistanis -- probably a majority -- who still find the current political structure unsatisfactory. Just as Junejo last year got more power for himself and the assembly by exploiting Zia's need to make the new structure credible, Bhutto is getting freedom of action by exploiting Junejo's (and Zia's) need to show that the removal of martial law makes a difference.

Those who have power, including the newly elected members of the national and provincial assemblies, are not prepared to give it up in response to Bhutto's demand for new elections. It will take more than peaceful assemblies, however massive, to prompt elections before the scheduled 1990 date. The dilemma for Bhutto, however, is that if she does not produce results within a reasonable time frame (she now calls for elections in the fall), her support base will erode, but if she pushes too hard and provokes a violent confrontation, the Army will step in.

Bhutto was the main subject of conversation everywhere I went (including India, where her prospects are the subject of intense interest). Although many Pakistanis had doubts about her abilities and her vision, most in my audiences seemed ready for change and see her, notwithstanding her own origins in a feudal, landlord family, as the only hope for modernizing Pakistan. At the same time, most Pakistanis seem reasonably satisfied with their material situation, and short of an unforeseen political or economic crisis, there is no readily apparent reason why they should be any more ready now than in the past to risk their lives for political change.

India Under Rajiv Gandhi

As can be readily discerned from a perusal of the Indian and international press, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's political problems are continuing to mount. The failure of his government to carry through with the settlement of the Punjab situation, which was to include the transfer of Chandigarh in its entirety to Punjab state as a capital and the transfer of a number of Hindi-speaking villages to neighboring Haryana state, dealt a serious blow to the prospects for easing the crisis. As of this writing, casualties and attacks on Hindus by Sikh extremists continue to mount. In this, as in other areas, Gandhi has been hamstrung by political maneuvering on the part of putative Congress(I) supporters.

The Congress(I) needs Gandhi, but a host of would be power-brokers seek to dominate policy to serve their own ends. They are not particularly receptive to his notions of economic reform and reconciliation at home and abroad. In fairness to his critics, Gandhi's style of government, is not greatly different from that of his mother. Both because of his temperament and a paucity of talent in the Congress(I), all important decisions are made by Gandhi and a group of close advisors, including his uncle Arun Nehru, and Doon School chums (see Far Eastern Economic Review, May 29, 1986).

Gandhi's handling of foreign affairs also has raised questions about his ability to lead. While his instincts seem to favor better relations with India's neighbors, he has been frustrated by the intractability of regional problems such as the Sri Lanka crisis and the obstacles to normalizing relations with Pakistan. His stances on international issues often raise questions about his policies and even his grasp of foreign affairs.

It remains uncertain who is really guiding foreign policy. The earlier downgrading of G. P. Parthasarathy, head of the Secretariat policy planning

committee, and the selection of Bali Ram Bhagat as external affairs minister, suggested a move by Gandhi to take personal charge of foreign affairs. Bhagat, however, apparently was insufficiently knowledgeable of foreign affairs to function effectively even as a transmission belt.

Gandhi faced a mini-revolt in his party in April 1986 when the Congress(I) working president, Kamalapati Tripathi, backed by others, sent a sharply worded letter accusing him of replacing Indira Gandhi stalwarts with another set of power brokers, and for favoring the rich and the new business elites. Gandhi responded by expelling from the party for six years several politicians thought to have engineered the letter, including Mrs. Gandhi's former home Minister, Pranab Mukherjee. (Constitutionally, Mukherjee had been in line as an interim Prime Minister when she was killed by Sikh extremists in November 1984, but Rajiv had been named Prime Minister instead.)

Subsequent actions raised more questions. The April 1986 creation of a reconstituted Policy Advisory Committee, chaired by G.P. Parthasarathy, with broad national security and economic affairs functions, gave rise to conflicting interpretations. Some saw the inclusion of key aides Arun Nehru and Arun Singh, as indicating that the creation of the panel was a major effort to coordinate foreign and defense policy. Others saw it as a potential sop to Parthasarathy and a gesture to nuclear "hawks" such as K. Subramanyam, also included in the advisory panel. The Indian press took note of the inclusion of both official members and members participating in their private capacity, and the lack of statutory authority such as exists for the U.S. National Security Council.

In early May, Gandhi carried out a major cabinet reshuffle that focused concern on his style and degree of control over affairs. Although the move included understandable actions such as replacing the foreign minister,

Bali Ram Bhagat, with the more experienced P. Shiv Shankar, the main political objective according to press sources seemed to be to bring representatives of additional states into the cabinet. Curiously, Gandhi selected as home minister, Buta Singh, a Sikh blamed by his community for supporting the May 1984 Army attack on the Golden Temple, in Amritsar. According to press accounts, Sikh leaders would refuse to deal with him and effective control of policy towards the Punjab crisis would fall to Gandhi's uncle, Arun Nehru, named minister of state (below cabinet level) for internal security last year. (Washington Post, May 13, 1986, p. A15)

U.S.-India Relations

The improvement in U.S.-India relations that followed Rajiv Gandhi's election appears to have lost momentum. Politically, the governments show little sense of shared interests. In areas where Washington and Delhi have agreed to promote ties, such as technological cooperation, progress is slow.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), initialed with fanfare in May 1985, was to be the centerpiece of U.S.-India relations. While progress has occurred on some important deals, such as U.S. approval of India's purchase of Control Data Corporation main frame computers, both U.S. and Indian officials express exasperation at the slow pace. U.S. officials express frustration that India, like China, appears more interested in using each approval for technology transfer as a basis requesting even more sophisticated technology, (the Control Data agreement led to a renewed request for the Cyber 205 computer), or creating a more competitive international bid situation. Conversely, Indian officials express frustration that procedures required by the United States under the MOU to prevent the misuse or transfer of sensitive technology have created additional impediments to technology

transfer. It is argued that lower level technology imports previously not requiring Indian government approval are now subjected to licensing to satisfy U.S. requirements under the MOU.

The still byzantine workings of the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy and the nebulous role of close political advisors to the Prime Minister make it difficult to assess the status and prospects of issues in Indo-U.S. relations. The locus of decision-making authority in a particular case is often unclear.

In the view of some officials, the best progress is being achieved at the personal and institutional level under the Scientific and Technology Initiative. Scientists at Indian research institutes value highly the American connection.

Nuclear Proliferation Prospects

While it is not a foregone conclusion that India and Pakistan will build nuclear weapons in the near term, the trend line appears adverse. The nuclear program is extremely popular in Pakistan, though Pakistani elites seem increasingly aware that the country's interests could be harmed by actually acquiring nuclear weapons.

Indian audiences expressed great interest in a reports that surfaced during a recent Senate hearing to the effect that Pakistan was now enriching uranium up to 30 percent or more of the fissile isotope U-235 at its clandestine centrifuge installation at Kahuta, in violation of a warning by the Reagan Administration that enrichment should not exceed 5 percent (weapons grade uranium is about 90 percent U-235). The Indian press has interpreted the refusal of U.S. Ambassador-at-large Richard T. Kennedy to respond to the report in open session as confirming its validity (Hindustan Times, April

13, 1986). Knowledgeable Indians, both official and non-official, judge that Pakistan will not likely explode a device so long as it values the continuation of U.S. security assistance and does not wish to provoke India to go nuclear, but they do not accept Pakistani declarations of peaceful intent.

In the absence of an overt step by Pakistan, the Indian government faces the dilemma of how to respond to these and other indications that Pakistan is close to a bomb capability. The situation plays into the hands of bomb lobbyists such as K. Subramanyam, who has labored tirelessly over the years to promote the cause of nuclear weapons. Subramanyam acknowledges that the bomb will not make India more secure, but argues that it will increase India's power and prestige. Subramanyam's inclusion on the new policy advisory committee has created intense speculation. It remains an open question whether his elevation represents cosmetic concession to the hawks or a decision to bring into the advisory body the expertise of India's most well known nuclear strategist.

Indians who favor the nuclear option give two prime reasons for their belief that, after more than a decade of restraint, India should opt for the bomb. First, Pakistan has reached a stage of development that can no longer be ignored. Second, the technology is now developed to build a credible small nuclear force. Press reports indicate that India, like Pakistan, is seeking covertly to acquire nuclear materials and weapons-related technology in the international marketplace. (See Economist, Foreign Report, May 1, 1986)

Others, including Indian foreign ministry officials, deny that India has decided to go nuclear, and say that the Subramanyam view is still not dominant. There remain serious disincentives for India to take the first

step, including a desire not to undercut U.S. congressional reaction were Pakistan to explode a device or build a bomb.

The prospect that New Delhi and Islamabad might find a way to agree, tacitly or overtly, to keep the nuclear genie in the bottle has fallen victim to the latest round of acrimony and mutual recriminations. In December 1985, Zia and Gandhi met and tentatively agreed to forswear attacks on each others nuclear installations. This by itself would have merely ratified what was already in each others interest, but it opened the door slightly to a more fundamental discussion of the nuclear question.

In the aftermath of new clashes on a remote glacier in Kashmir and new Indian accusations of Pakistani meddling in the Punjab crisis, however, Prime Minister Gandhi cancelled his scheduled April 1986 visit to Pakistan and the accord has not been signed.